Tom Hayden: Ten Years from Port Huron

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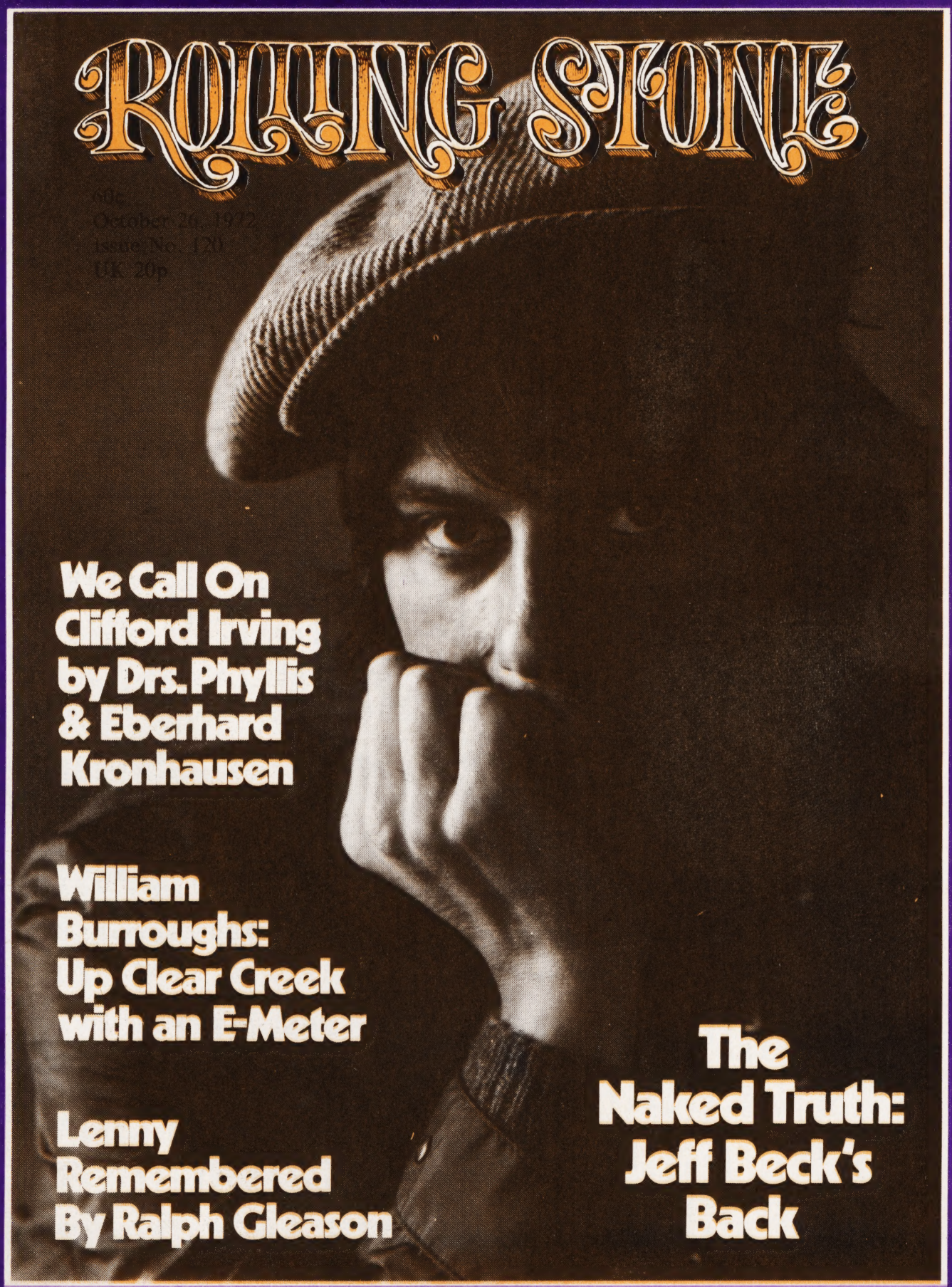
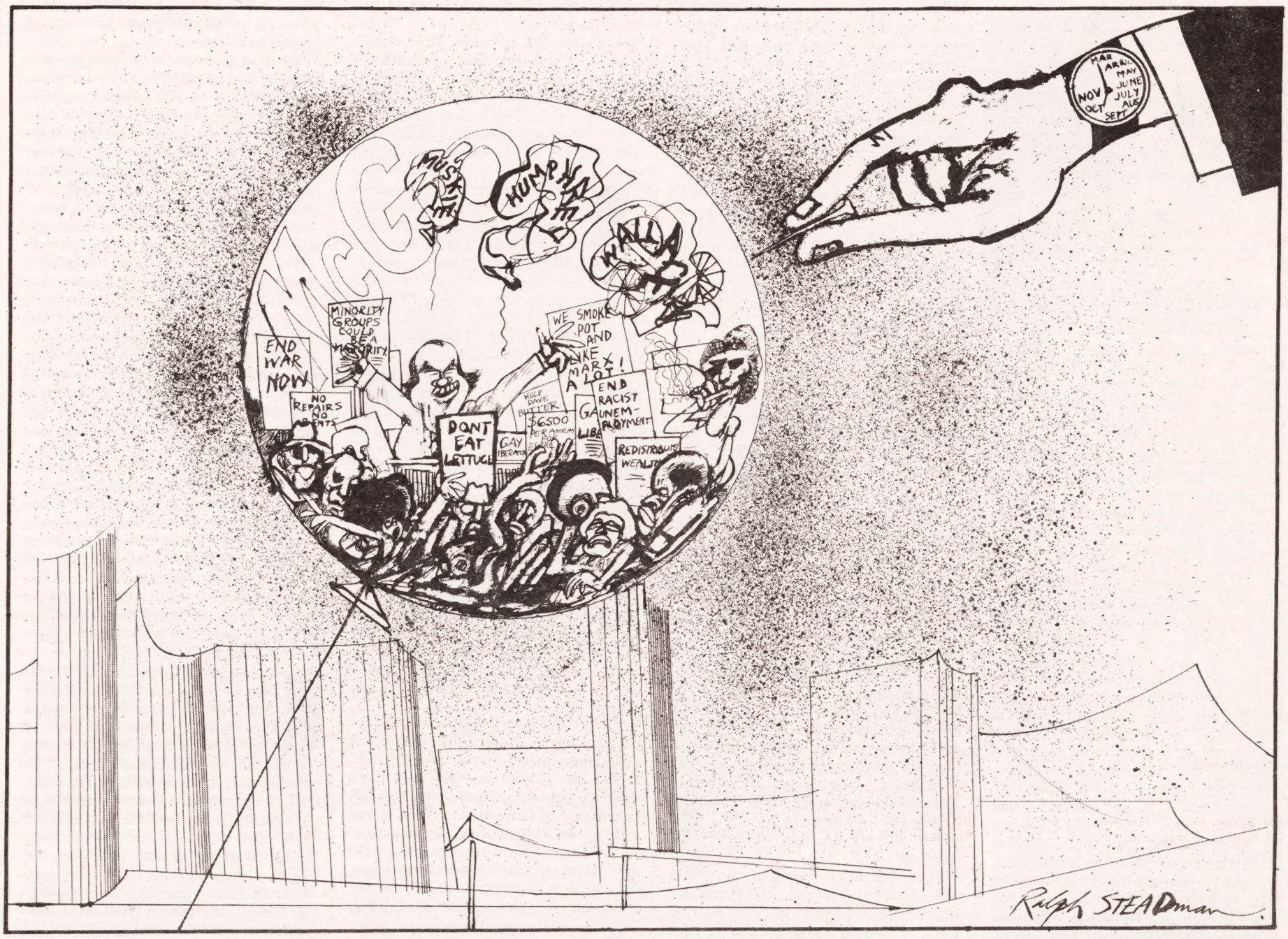


Fear & Loathing:
The Fat City Blues

By Hunter S. Thompson



Hear me, people: We have now to deal with another race—small and feeble when our fathers first met them, but now great and overbearing. Strangely enough they have a mind to till the soil and the love of possession is a disease with them. These people have made many rules that the rich may break but the poor may not. They take their tithes from the poor and weak to support the rich and those who rule.

—Chief Sitting Bull, speaking at the Powder River Conference in 1877

If George McGovern had a speechwriter half as eloquent as Sitting Bull, he would be home free today—instead of 22 points behind and racing around the country with both feet in his mouth. The Powder River Conference ended 95 years ago, but the old Chief's baleful analysis of the White Man's rape of the American continent was just as accurate then as it would be today if he came back from the dead and said it for the microphones on prime-time TV. The ugly fallout from the American Dream has been coming down on us at a pretty consistent rate since Sitting Bull's time—and the only real difference now, with Election Day '72 only a few weeks away, is that we seem to be on the verge of *ratifying* the fallout and forgetting the Dream itself.

Sitting Bull made no distinction between Democrats and Republicans—which was probably just as well, in 1877 or any other year—but it's also true that Sitting Bull never knew the degradation of traveling on Richard Nixon's press plane; he never had the bilious pleasure of dealing with Ron Ziegler, and he never met John Mitchell, Nixon's king fixer.

If the old Sioux Chief had ever done these things, I think—despite his angry contempt for the White Man and everything he stands for—he'd be working overtime for George McGovern today.

These past two weeks have not been calm ones, for me. Immediately after the Republican convention in Miami, I dragged myself back to the Rockies and tried to forget about politics for a while—just lie naked on the porch in the cool afternoon sun and watch the aspen trees turning gold on the hills around my house; mix up a huge cannister of gin and grapefruit juice, watch the horses nuzzling each other in the pasture across the road, big logs in the fireplace at night; Herbie Mann, John Prine and Jesse Colin Young booming out of the speakers . . . zip off every once in a while for a fast run into town along a back road above the river: to the health center gym for some volleyball, then over to Benton's gallery to get caught up on whatever treacheries the local greedheads rammed through while I was gone, watch the late TV news and curse McGovern for poking another hole in his own boat, then stop by the Jerome on the way out of town for a midnight beer with Solheim.

After two weeks on that peaceful human schedule, the last thing I wanted to think about was the grim, inescapable spectre of two more frenzied months on the campaign trail. Especially when it meant coming back here to Washington, to start laying the groundwork for a long and painful autopsy job on the McGovern campaign. What went wrong? Why had it failed? Who was to blame? And, finally, what next?

That was one project. The other was to somehow pass through the fine eye of the White House security camel and go out on the campaign trail with Richard Nixon, to watch him waltz in—if only to get the drift of his thinking, to watch his moves, his eyes. It is a nervous thing to consider: Not just four *more* years of Nixon, but Nixon's *last four years in politics*—completely unshackled, for the first time in his life, from any need to worry about who might or might not vote for him the next time around.

If he wins in November, he will finally be free to do whatever he wants. . . . or maybe "wants" is too strong a word for right now. It conjures up images of Papa Doc, Batista, Somoza; jails full of bewildered "political prisoners" and the constant cold-sweat fear of jackboots suddenly kicking your door off its hinges at four in the morning.

There is no point in kidding ourselves about what Richard Nixon really *wants* for America. When he stands at his White House window and looks out on an anti-war demonstration, he doesn't see "dissenters," he sees *criminals*. Dangerous parasites, preparing to strike at the heart of the Great American System that put him where he is today.

There may not be much difference between Democrats and Republicans; I have made that argument myself—with considerable venom, as I recall—over the past ten months. . . . But only a blind geek or a waterhead could miss the difference between McGovern and Richard Nixon. Granted, they are both white men; and both are politicians—but the similarity ends right there, and from that point on the difference is so vast that anybody who can't see it deserves whatever happens to them if Nixon gets re-elected due to apathy, stupidity and laziness on the part of potential McGovern voters.

The tragedy of this campaign is that McGovern and his staff wizards have not been able to dramatize what is really at stake on November 7th. We are not looking at just another dim rerun of the '68 Nixon-Humphrey trip, or the LBJ-Goldwater fiasco in '64. Those were both useless drills. I voted for Dick Gregory in '68, and for "No" in '64. . . . but this one is different, and since McGovern is so goddamn maddeningly inept with the kind of words he needs to make people understand what he's up to, it will save a lot of time here—and strain on my own weary head, to remember Bobby Kennedy's ultimate characterization of Richard Nixon, in a speech at Vanderbilt University in the spring of '68, not long before he was murdered.

"Richard Nixon," he said, *"represents the dark side of the American spirit."*

I don't remember what else he said that day. I guess I could look it up in The New York Times speech morgue, but why bother? That one line says it all.

Anybody who doubts it should go out and catch The President's act, the next time he swoops into the local airport. Watch the big silver-and-blue custom-built 707 come booming down the runway and roll up in front of the small but well-disciplined crowd of Nixon Youth cheerleaders singing the "Nixon Now" song, waving their freshly-printed red-white-and-blue RE-ELECT THE PRESIDENT signs and then pausing, in perfect spontaneous unison, before intimidating every TV crew on the runway with the stylish "Four More Years!" chant.

Watch The President emerge from the belly of the plane, holding hands with the aging barbie doll known as his wife, and ooze down the rolling VIP stairway while the 105th Division Rol-

ling Thunder Women & Children Classic Napalm US Army Parade Band whips the crowd higher & higher with a big-beat rendition of "God Save the Freaks."

See the Generals strut down from the plane behind The President. Take a long look at the grinning "local dignitaries" who are ushered out, by armed guards, to greet him. See the White House press corps over there about 200 yards away, herded into that small corral behind heavy ropes stretched around red-white-and-blue painted oil drums. Why are they smiling?

The Pope, The Punk, & The Press

I went out on the campaign trail with Richard Nixon last week. . . . Right: After seven straight days of savage in-fighting with the White House press office, the bastards finally caved in and let me join up, if only for a few days, with the Presidential Press Corps.

Cazart! Vindication! When the magic words of approval finally zipped across the phone line from the White House to my room on the top floor of the Washington Hilton, my brain went limp with pride. "We'll leave from Andrews Air Force Base," said the hard baritone voice of deputy press secretary Gerald Warren. "I don't have the final schedule yet, but if you call me before noon tomorrow I'll tell you exactly when to be there with your bags."

Indeed. My bags. No doubt they would be searched thoroughly, prior to boarding, by extremely sophisticated electronic machinery and a brace of super-sharp Secret Service agents. *When you travel on the Presidential Press Plane, boy, you do it OUR way.*

Of course. I was ready for it: A total skin-search, if necessary, and perhaps even a lie-detector: *Do you have any violent thoughts regarding the President?*

Violent? Certainly not. We're old football buddies.

Football buddies?

Right. Richard and I go way back. I was with him long ago, in the snows of New Hampshire. Things were different then, fella. Where were *you* in the winter of '68?

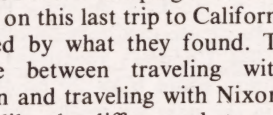
I was ready for all the standard-brand Secret Service bullshit. The only thing that worried me was that maybe some of the SS boys might have seen the current ROLLING STONE—which was available, that week, at newsstands all over Washington. It contained, along with my calm & well-reasoned analysis of the recent GOP convention in Miami, some of the most brutal and hateful caricatures of Richard Nixon ever committed to print, in this country or any other.

That crazy bastard Steadman! Why is it that it's always your *friends* who cause you to be screwed to the wall? What do you say when you go across town to the White House to apply for press credentials to cover the Nixon campaign as the National Affairs Editor of ROLLING STONE and the first thing you see when you walk through the door of the press office is one of Steadman's unconscionably obscene Nixon/Agnew drawings tacked up on the bulletin board with a big red circle around Ralph's name?

Well . . . ah . . . yes. Ho ho, eh? My name is . . . ah . . . Thompson, from ROLLING STONE, and I'm here to pick up my credentials to fly around the country with President Nixon on Air Force One for the next month or so.

Cold stare from the man at the desk. No handshake offered.

"Well . . . Ho ho, eh? I can't help but notice you've been admiring the work of my friend Ralph Steadman. Ho ho, he sure has an eye for it, eh? Sure does. Good ole Ralph." Sad smile and shrug the shoulders. "Crazy as a loon, of course. Hereditary brain syphilis." Keep smiling, another shrug. "Jesus, what can you do, eh? These goddamn vicious limeys will do anything for money. He was paid *well* for these rotten drawings. My protests were totally ignored. It's a fucking shame, I say. What the hell is the world coming to when the goddamn British can get away with stuff like this?"



Nixon has never made any secret of his feelings about the press. They are still the same gang of "biased bastards" and "cynical sons of bitches" that he called them, backstage, on election day in California ten years ago when he made his now-legendary concession statement after losing the 1962 governor's race to Pat Brown. His aides tried to restrain him, but Nixon would have none of it. Trembling with rage, he confronted a hotel ballroom full of political reporters and snarled: "This is my last press conference! You won't have Richard Nixon to kick around anymore!"

He failed to honor that pledge, but the anger that caused him to utter it still burns in his breast. He rarely holds press conferences, and his personal relationship with the working press is almost nonexistent. In the White House and on the road, he "communicates" with the press corps through his mouthpiece, press secretary Ron Ziegler—an arrogant 33-year-old punk who trained for his current job by working as a PR man for Disneyland, and who treats the White House press corps like a gang of troublesome winos who will only be tolerated as long as they keep out of the boss' hair.

The few reporters who switched off the McGovern campaign to travel with Nixon on this last trip to California were shocked by what they found. The difference between traveling with McGovern and traveling with Nixon is just about like the difference between going on tour with the Grateful Dead and going on tour with the Pope.

My first experience with it came shortly after Nixon's arrival in Oakland. After nervously pressing the flesh with some of the several hundred well-drilled young "supporters" who'd been rounded up to greet him for the TV cameras, Nixon was hustled off in a huge black bulletproof Cadillac for a brief appearance at one of the Bay Area's new rapid-transit stations. The three big press buses followed, taking a different route, and when we arrived at the BART station we were hauled down by freight elevator to a narrow hallway outside a glass-walled control room.

Moments later Nixon emerged from a nearby subway tunnel, waved briefly at the crowd, and was ushered into the control room with a dozen or so local Republican dignitaries. Two photographers were allowed inside to take pictures of The President shaking hands and making small talk with the engineers. His pithy remarks were broadcast out to the press mob in the hallway, by means of loudspeakers.

After watching for a moment, I turned to Bob Greene, a young Chicago Sun-Times reporter who had just dropped off the McGovern campaign. "Jesus," I said. "Is it always like this?"

He laughed. "Hell, this is *accessible*! We can actually *see* him. I spent about 12 hours *covering* him in New York yesterday, and I never saw him once—except on closed-circuit TV when he made his speech last night. They had us in a separate room, with speakers and TV monitors."

Our next stop was across the Bay in San Francisco, where Nixon was scheduled to address several hundred "Young Republicans" at a $500-a-plate lunch in the ballroom of the (ITT-owned) Sheraton Palace hotel. Thousands of anti-war demonstrators milled around in the streets outside, kept off at a safe distance by hundreds of cops carrying 12-gauge shotguns.

Nixon's "remarks" were piped into the press room, where the cream of American journalism sat down with each other at several long white-cloth-covered banquet tables, to eat a roast beef buffet and take notes while staring intently at two big brown speakers hung on the wall. I went across the street to the Shields House tavern, where I met a 30-year-old merchant seaman wearing a tweed sports coat and a tie, who said he and three friends had just "split from that goddamn phoney sideshow across the street."

"The Nixon rally?" I asked.

He nodded. "Shit, they tried to make us rehearse cheers! They put us all in a big room and told us to synchronize our watches so we would all start singing that goddamn 'Nixon Now' song at exactly 1:17 PM, when his car pulled up to the door."

I smiled and ordered a Tuborg. "Why not? You can't sing? You mean you just blew $500 on that lunch, and you didn't even stay to eat it?"

He waved me off. "Shit, are you kidding? Do I *look* like one of those Young Republican assholes? You think I'd pay $500 to have lunch with *Nixon*?"

I shrugged.

"Hell no!" he said. "Some guy down at the Maritime Hall just came up and asked us if we wanted to go to a $500-a-plate lunch, for free. We said sure, so he gave us the tickets—but he didn't say anything about cheering and singing songs." He shook his head. "Hell no, not me. When they started that bullshit I just walked out."

"Your friends stayed?" I asked.

He shrugged. "I guess so. They were pretty loaded."

"Loaded?" I said. "Nixon supporters?"

He looked at me. "Nixon? Are you nuts?"

I started to ask him about McGovern, but just then my attorney arrived and we got heavily into business matters until I looked out the window and noticed the press buses beginning to fill up. Moments later we pulled out, with a massive police escort, and joined the Nixon motorcade going back to the Oakland airport, where the press plane was waiting to haul us down to L.A.

Nixon, as always, made the trip in his private compartment aboard Air Force One. Five or six "pool" reporters went with him. Or at least they went on the same plane. The tiny press compartment is far back in the rear, and nobody leaves it, in flight, except by special permission from Ron Ziegler—who routinely accepts individual requests for brief interviews with Nixon, and just as routinely ignores them.

When we got to L.A. I asked the UPI "pool" man if there was any professional advantage in traveling on Air Force One, instead of the press plane.

"Absolutely none," he replied. "We never leave the compartment; just sit in there and play cards. They could all be running around naked up there in front, for all we know. We don't even get on and off the plane through the same door Nixon uses. Ours is way back in the tail."

"You never get a chance to talk with him?" I asked. "Never even *see* him?"

He shook his head. "Not usually." He paused. "Oh, every once in a while he'll ask somebody up front for a few minutes, but it's almost always for *his* reasons, not ours. You know—like if he happens to be writing a speech about hog futures, or something, he might ask Ron if any of the pool guys that day used to be pig farmers. . . ."

I shook my head sadly. "Sounds pretty frustrating."

He shrugged. "No, not really. No worse than riding on the press plane."

Which is probably true. The entire White House press corps apparently lives in fear of somehow getting on the wrong side of Ziegler. He is their only human connection with the man they're supposed to be covering—and since they can't possible get to Nixon on their own, they have to deal with Ron. Every once in a while someone will freak out and start yelling at him, but that involves serious risks. It is just about impossible to stay on the White House beat if Ziegler won't talk to you, and if you push him far enough that's exactly what will happen.

Even king bee types like the Associated Press correspondent Walter Mears and The New York Times' Bob Semple are nervous in Ziegler's presence. The White House beat is one of the most prestigious in American journalism, but Ziegler manages to make it so uncomfortable and potentially humiliating that only the most ambitious reporters still push for it.

The handful of McGovern exiles who traveled with Nixon to California found themselves standing off in little knots by themselves in the press room of Los Angeles' Century Plaza Hotel, and saying things like: "Jesus, this is really incredible! These White House guys are totally broken, they act like sick sheep . . . Christ, McGovern would laugh all night if he could see guys like Mears and Semple whimpering around and kissing Ron Ziegler's ass."

Just for the record, here is the pool report from Nixon's New York to California trip. Contrary to popular impression, the press does not ride free. The rate on the chartered planes is First Class plus one third, so to send the 200 newsmen who went along on this expedition cost, including copy transmission expenses, approximately a grand apiece.

POOL REPORT—Waldorf to Oakland airport—Sept 27

The motorcade departed the Waldorf at 9:28. Fair crowds were out at 50th and Lexington to wave at the President, and knots of people dotted the path. On FDR Drive, small groups of hardhats appeared here and there, waving at the President as he sped by.

Choppers from the Wall Street helipad took a last swing past the Statue of Liberty before reaching Newark. Wheels up was at 9:50.

All was quiet aboard Air Force One until press secretary Ziegler materialized with statements that had already been released aboard the press plane. John Ehrlichman appeared briefly with some added information on BART financing. A total of $219 million in financing has come from the government, out of the total cost of $1.4 billion. Of this new grant of $38 million, $26.6 million goes to work along Market Street. The rest goes to various items such as development of an undercar fire protection system, a fare collection data collecting system, storage buildings, and car washing equipment.

Mr. Ehrlichman also advised that Clark MacGregor has called upon the opposition to "repudiate" demonstrations said to be aborning in San Francisco. Information that demonstrations are being generated "squares with some intelligence that law enforcement agencies had," he said, which shows that "these demonstrations are political rather than of an anti-war nature." Asked if it was possible to make that distinction, Ehrlichman implied that the agencies know what is going on. He did not clarify. He added that the "motorcade seems to be the prime target."

Henry Hubbard, Newsweek
Jack Germond, Manchester Union-Leader

Black Times at 1972 K Street

"The worst thing to look like right now is a politician; this is a bad year for them."

—Frank Mankiewicz; April, 1972

"McGovern was doing better when he was an anti-politician."

—George Gallup; September, 1972

"You know, I finally figured out why McGovern's gonna get his ass beat this year: He doesn't have half the class of the people who work for him. As a matter of fact, I'm beginning to think George McGovern doesn't have much class at all."

—Jack Germond, Manchester Union-Leader correspondent; October, 1972

"Seldom has the public perception of a major political figure changed so rapidly. George McGovern's political problem stems not from the belief that

—Continued on Next Page

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he is a dangerous radical and unpatriotic American. His trouble lies in the way people feel about him personally. Many who were attracted to him earlier this year because of his freshness and promise now express strong disillusionment."

—Haynes Johnson in The Washington Post; October, 1972

The mood at McGovern's grim headquarters building at 1910 K St., NW, in Washington is oddly schizoid these days: A jangled mix of defiance and despair—tempered, now and then, by quick flashes of a lingering conviction that George can still win.

McGovern's young staffers, after all, have never lost an election they expected to win, at the outset—and they definitely expected to win this one. They are accustomed to being far behind in the public opinion polls. McGovern has always been the underdog, and—except for California—he has always been able to close the gap with a last-minute stretch run.

Even in the primaries he lost—New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania—he did well enough to embarrass the pollsters, humiliate the pols and crank up his staff morale another few notches.

But that boundless blind faith is beginning to fade now. The Curse of Eagleton is beginning to make itself felt in the ranks. And not even Frank Mankiewicz, the Wizard of Chevy Chase, can properly explain why McGovern is now being sneered at from coast to coast as "just another politician." Mankiewicz is still the main drive wheel in this ham-strung campaign; he has been the central intelligence from the very beginning—which was fine all around, while it worked, but there is not a hell of a lot of evidence to suggest that it's working real well these days, and it is hard to avoid the idea that Frank is just as responsible for whatever is happening now as he was six months ago, when McGovern came wheeling out of New Hampshire like the Abominable Snowman on a speed trip.

If George gets stomped in November, it will not be because of anything Richard Nixon did to him. The blame will trace straight back to his brain-trust, to whoever had his ear tight enough to convince him that all that bullshit about "new politics" was fine for the primaries, but it would never work against Nixon—so he would have to abandon his original power base, after Miami, and swiftly move to consolidate the one he'd just shattered: The Meany-Daley-Humphrey-Muskie axis, the senile remnants of the Democratic Party's once-powerful "Roosevelt coalition."

McGovern agreed. He went to Texas and praised LBJ; he revised his economic program to make it more palatable on Wall Street; he went to Chicago and endorsed the whole Daley/Democratic ticket, including State's Attorney Ed Hanrahan, who is still under indictment on felony-conspiracy (Obstruction of Justice) charges for his role in a police raid on local Black Panther headquarters three years ago that resulted in the murder of Fred Hampton.

In the speedy weeks between March and July, the atmosphere in McGovern's cramped headquarters building on Capitol Hill was so high that you could get bent by just hanging around and watching the human machinery at work.

The headquarters building itself was not much bigger than McGovern's personal command post in the Senate Office Building, five blocks away. It was one big room about the size of an Olympic swimming pool—with a grocery store on one side, a liquor store on the other, and a tree-shaded sidewalk out front. The last time I was there, about two weeks before the California primary, I drove my blue Volvo up on the sidewalk and parked right in front of the door. Crouse went inside to find Mankiewicz while I picked up some Ballantine ale.

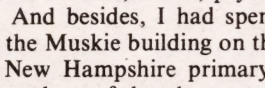
"Is this a charge?" the booze-clerk asked.

"Right," I said. "Charge it to George McGovern."

He nodded, and began to write it down.

"Hey, wait a minute!" I said. "I was just kidding. Here—there's the cash."

He shrugged and accepted the three bills . . . and when I got to Frank's office and told him what had happened, he didn't seem surprised. "Yeah, our credit's pretty good," he said, "in a lot of places where we never even asked for it."



That was back in May, when the tide was still rising. But things were different now, and the credit is not so easy. The new K Street headquarters is an eight-story tomb once occupied by Edmond Muskie. He abandoned it when he dropped out of the race for the Democratic nomination, and it stood empty for a month or so after that—but when McGovern croaked Humphrey in California and became the nominee-apparent, his wizards decided to get a new and larger headquarters.

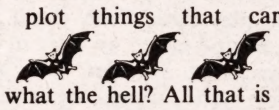
The Muskie building was an obvious choice—if only because it was available very cheap, and already wired for the fantastic maze of phone lines necessary for a presidential campaign headquarters. Big Ed and his army of big-time backers had already taken care of that aspect; they had plenty of phone lines, along with all those endorsements.

Not everybody on the McGovern staff was happy with the idea of moving out of the original headquarters. The decision was made in California, several days before the primary, and I remember arguing with Gary Hart about it. He insisted the move was necessary, for space reasons . . . and even in retrospect my argument for keeping the original headquarters seems irrational. It was a matter of karma, I said; psychic continuity. And besides, I had spent some time in the Muskie building on the night of the New Hampshire primary, when the atmosphere of the place was strongly reminiscent of Death Row at Sing Sing. So my memories of that building were not pleasant—but my reasons, as usual, had a noticeably mystic flavor to them. And Gary, as usual, was thinking in terms of hard lawyer's logic and political pragmatism.

So the McGovern headquarters were moved, after Miami, from its original base between the liquor store and the grocery store on Capitol Hill—to the Muskie tomb on K Street, in the fashionable downtown area. It was a central location, they said, with a big parking lot next door. It also had two elevators and 16 bathrooms.

The original headquarters had only one bathroom, with a cardboard arrow on the door that could be moved, like a one-armed clock, to three different positions: MEN, WOMEN or EMPTY.

There was also a refrigerator. It was small, but somehow there were always a few cans of beer in it, even for visiting journalists. Nobody was in charge of stocking it, but nobody drank the last beer without replacing it, either . . .(or maybe it was all a shuck from the start; maybe they had a huge stash outside the back door, but they only kept two or three cans in the refrigerator, so that anybody who drank one would feel so guilty that he/she would bring six to replace it, the next time they came around . . . but I doubt it; not even that devious Arab bastard Rick Stearns would plot things that carefully).



But what the hell? All that is history now, and after roaming around the new (Muskie) headquarters building for a week or so, the only refrigerator I found was up in finance director Henry Kimmelman's office on the sixth floor. I went up there with Pat Caddell one afternoon last week to watch the Cronkite/Chancellor TV news—(every afternoon at 6:30, all activity in the building is suspended for an hour while the staff people gather around TV sets to watch "the daily bummer," as some of them call it)—and Kimmelman has the only accessible color set in the building, so his office is usually crowded for the news hour.

But his set is fucked, unfortunately. One of the color tubes is blown, so everything that appears on the screen has a wet purple tint to it. When McGovern comes on, rapping out lines from a speech that somebody watching one of the headquarter's TV sets just wrote for him a few hours earlier, his face appears on the set in Kimmelman's office as if he were speaking up from the bottom of a swimming pool full of cheap purple dye.

It is not a reassuring thing to see, and most of the staffers prefer to watch the news on the black & white sets downstairs in the political section. . . .

What? We seem to be off the track here. I was talking about my first encounter with the refrigerator in Henry Kimmelman's office—when I was looking for beer, and found none. The only thing in the icebox was a canned martini that tasted like brake fluid.

One canned martini. No beer. A purple TV screen. Both elevators jammed in the basement; 15 empty bathrooms. Seventy-five cents an hour to park in the lot next door. Chaos and madness in the telephone switchboard. Fear in the back rooms, confusion up front, and a spooky vacuum on top—the eighth floor—where Larry O'Brien is supposed to be holding the gig together . . . what is he doing up there? Nobody knows. They never see him.

"Larry travels a lot," one of the speechwriters told me. "He's Number One, you know—and when you're Number One you don't have to try so hard, right?"

The McGovern campaign appears to be fucked, at this time. A spectacular, Come From Behind win is still possible—on paper and given the right circumstances—but the underlying realities of the campaign itself would seem to preclude this. A cohesive, determined campaign with the same kind of multi-level morale that characterized the McGovern effort in the months preceding the Wisconsin primary might be a good bet to close a 20-point gap on Nixon in the last month of this grim presidential campaign.

As usual, Nixon has peaked too early—and now he is locked into what is essentially a Holding Action. Which would be disastrous in a close race, but—even by Pat Caddell's (partisan) estimate—Nixon could blow 20 points off his lead in the next six weeks, and still win. (Caddell's figures seem in general agreement with those of the most recent Gallup Poll, ten days ago, which showed that Nixon could blow 30 points off his lead and still win.)

My own rude estimate is that McGovern will steadily close the gap between now and November 7th, but not enough. If I had to make book right now, I would try to get McGovern with seven or eight points, but I'd probably go with five or six, if necessary. In other words, my guess at the moment is that McGovern will lose by a popular vote margin of 5.5 percent—and probably far worse in the electoral college.

The tragedy of this is that McGovern appeared to have a sure lock on the White House when the sun came up on Miami Beach on the morning of Thursday, July 13th. Since then he has crippled himself with a series of almost unbelievable blunders—Eagleton, Salinger, O'Brien, etc.—that have understandably convinced huge chunks of the electorate, including at least half of McGovern's own hard-core supporters, that The Candidate is a gibbering dingbat. His behavior since Miami has made a piecemeal mockery of everything he seemed to stand for during the primaries.

Possibly I'm wrong on all this. It is still conceivable—to me at least—that McGovern might actually win. In which case I won't have to worry about my P.O. Box at the Woody Creek general store getting jammed up with dinner invitations from the White House. But what the hell? Mr. Nixon never invited me, and neither did Kennedy or LBJ.

I survived those years of shame, and I'm not especially worried about enduring four more. I have a feeling that my time is getting short, anyway, and I can think of a hell of a lot of things I'd rather find in my mailbox than an invitation to dinner in the Servants' Quarters.

Let those treacherous bastards eat by themselves. They deserve each other.

Terminal Campaign Bloat?

Ah, Jesus! The situation is out of hand again. The sun is up, the deal is down, and that evil bastard Mankiewicz just jerked the king-pin out of my finely crafted saga for this issue. How long, O Lord, how long? My brain has gone numb from this madness. After squatting for 13 days in this scum-crusted room on the top floor of the Washington Hilton—writing feverishly, night after night, on the home-stretch realities of this goddamn wretched campaign—I am beginning to wonder what in the name of Twisted Jesus ever possessed me to come here in the first place. What kind of madness lured me back to this stinking swamp of a town?

Am I turning into a politics junkie? It is not a happy thought—particularly when I see what it's done to all the others. After two weeks in Woody Creek, getting back on the press plane was like going back to the cancer ward. Some of the best people in the press corps looked so physically ravaged that it was painful to even see them, much less stand around and make small talk.

Many appeared to be in the terminal stage of Campaign Bloat, a gruesome kind of false-fat condition that is said to be connected somehow with failing adrenaline glands. The swelling begins within 24 hours of that moment when the victim first begins to suspect that the campaign is essentially meaningless. At that point, the body's entire adrenaline supply is sucked back into the gizzard, and nothing either candidate says, does or generates will cause it to rise again . . . and without adrenaline, the flesh begins to swell; the eyes fill with blood and grow smaller in the face, the jowls puff out from the cheekbones, the neck-flesh droops and the belly swells up like a frog's throat. . . . The brain fills with noxious waste fluids, the tongue is rubbed raw on the molars, and the basic perception antennae begin dying like hairs in a bonfire.

I would like to think—or at least *claim* to think, out of charity if nothing else—that Campaign Bloat is at the root of this hellish angst that boils up to obscure my vision every time I try to write anything serious about Presidential Politics.

But I don't think that's it. The real reason, I suspect, is the problem of coming to grips with the idea that Richard Nixon will almost certainly be re-elected for another four years as President of the United States. If the current polls are reliable—and even if they aren't, the sheer size of the margin makes the numbers themselves unimportant—Nixon will be re-elected by a huge majority of Americans who feel he is not only more honest and more trustworthy than George McGovern, but also more likely to end the war in Vietnam.

The polls also indicate that Nixon will get a comfortable majority of the Youth Vote. And that he might carry all 50 states.

Well . . . maybe so. This may be the year when we finally come face to face with ourselves; finally just lay back and say it—that we are really just a nation of 220 million used car salesmen with all the money we need to buy guns, and no qualms at all about killing anybody else in the world who tries to make us uncomfortable.

The tragedy of all this is that George McGovern, for all his mistakes and all of his imprecise talk about "new politics" and "honesty in government," is really one of the few men who've run for President of the United States in this century who really understands, what a fantastic monument to all the best instincts of the human race this country might have been, if we could have kept it out of the hands of greedy little hustlers like Richard Nixon.

McGovern made some stupid mistakes, but in context they seem almost frivolous compared to the things Richard Nixon does every day of his life, on purpose, as a matter of policy and a perfect expression of everything he stands for.

Jesus! Where will it end? How low do you have to stoop in this country to be President?